

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6385

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SPOP, CM
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S ROLE IN DEALING WITH PRESSING GLOBAL
PROBLEMS - POPULATION GROWTH AND ADEQUATE FOOD PRODUCTION

REF: STATE 107370

1. SUMMARY. IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL THIS CABLE WILL SUMMARIZE
PRESENT GURC POLICY IN CONNECTION WITH POPULATION AND FOOD
PRODUCTION AND INDICATE TENOR OF ONGOING DIALOGUE, WHICH
GENERALLY TAKES PLACE ON ALL LEVELS WITHIN CONTEXT OF
PRESENT AND PROPOSED US MISSION PROGRAMS. END SUMMARY.

2. POPULATION. ACCORDING LATEST OFFICIAL CENSUS, IN
APRIL 1976 CAMEROONIAN POPULATION NUMBERED 7.66 MILLION,
OF WHICH 71.5 PERCENT LOCATED IN RURAL AREAS AND 28.5
PERCENT IN URBAN AREAS. OVERALL POPULATION DENSITY IS
RELATIVELY LOW, ABOUT 16.5 PERSONS/KM2, ANNUAL RATE OF
POPULATION GROWTH FOR PERIOD 1975-80 IS ESTIMATED AT
2.3 PERCENT. THIS LAST FIGURE IS A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE
OVER THE PERIOD 1960-75, WHEN, ACCORDING WORLD BANK
ESTIMATES, ANNUAL GROWTH RATES AVERAGED ABOUT 2.0
PERCENT. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT DURING THE PERIOD 1971-76
GDP IN REAL TERMS GREW AT A SLUGGISH RATE OF ONLY
2.5 PERCENT. ANOTHER DISTURBING TREND IS THE INORDINATELY
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HIGH ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF THE URBAN POPULATION, ABOUT
6.0 PERCENT (YAOUNDE'S POPULATION ALONE IS EXPANDING AT
AN ANNUAL RATE OF 10 PERCENT). THIS RAPID EXPANSION IS
PRIMARILY DUE TO A LARGE INFLUX OF MOSTLY YOUNG PEOPLE
(BETWEEN 15 AND 30) FROM THE RURAL AREAS.
AS A RESULT THE MOST PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF THE RURAL
POPULATION ENGAGED IN FOOD PRODUCTION ARE DECREASING

RELATIVELY, WHILE DEMAND FOR FOOD EXPANDS AS FUNCTION OF OVERALL POPULATION GROWTH.

3. OFFICIALLY, THE GURC IS OPPOSED TO SLOWING ITS PRESENT RATE OF OVERALL POPULATION GROWTH. PRESIDENT AHIDJO HIMSELF HAS CALLED FOR CAMEROON TO REACH A POPULATION GOAL OF 10 MILLION

1985 (AT PRESENT GROWTH RATE, POPULATION

WILL BE ABOUT 9.4 MILLION IN 1985). FURTHERMORE, A LAW ADOPTED IN 1968 IMPOSES RESTRICTUONS ON THE DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES. DESPITE OFFICIAL DECLARATIONS AND LAW, GURC ANTI-CONTRACEPTIVE POLICY HAS BEEN LIBERALIZED OVER PAST FIVE YEARS. GURC NOW TOLERATES COMMERCIAL SALE OF CONTRACEPTIVES AND ALLOWS THEIR FREE DISTRIBUTION IN CONTEXT OF PROGRAMS WHOSE PRIMARY AIM IS MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH CARE. THUS DISTRIBUTION OF CONTRACEPTIVES TO ACHIEVE QUOTE FAMILY SPACING UNQUOTE FOR HEALTH REASONS IS TOLERATED WHILE CONTRACEPTIVE USE FOR POPULATION CONTROL IS NOT. PRESENT LAISSEZ-FAIRE POLICY IS IN LARGE MEASURE RESULT OF AN AID-SUPPORTED PROJECT WHICH, THROUGH A CONTRACT WITH HARVARD UNIVERSITY, PROVIDED TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN MATERNAL AND CHILD CARE. IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT WERE THE ESTABLISHMENT IN 1973 OF A FAMILY-PLANNING CLINIC AND THE TRAINING IN CONTRACEPTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF MEDICAL STUDENTS, NURSES, AND MID-WIVES. DURING FY-79 AID WILL FOLLOW-UP ON THIS PROJECT BY ASSISTING GURC IN ESTABLISHING 50 HEALTH FACILITIES WHICH WILL PROVIDE SOME FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES. ONCE MORE, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE GURC CONSIDERS THIS TO BE A HEALTH CARE PROJECT AND NOT A PROJECT FOR POPULATION CONTROL.

4. FOOD PRODUCTION. THE GURC GIVES MAJOR EMPHASIS IN ITS CURRENT FIVE YEAR PLAN TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT. THE BASIC AIMS OF THIS POLICY ARE TO RAISE THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF THE RURAL POPULATION AND TO MEET THE COUNTRY'S NEEDS IN TERMS OF BOTH FOOD PRODUCTION FOR LOCAL CONSUMPTION AS WELL AS AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS. THE BASIC FACTS LYING BEHIND THIS POLICY CHOICE ARE THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE CAMEROONIAN PEOPLE LIVE AND WORK IN THE RURAL SECTOR, AND THAT THE GURC RECOGNIZES THAT THE COUNTRY'S AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL IS ITS MAIN RESOURCE. IN ADDITION, IT IS HOPED THAT THIS POLICY WILL HELP STEM THE TIDE OF THE RURAL EXODUS AND OF COURSE PROVIDE FOOD FOR THE BURGEONING URBAN POPULATION. PRIORITY HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO INCREASING THE PRODUCTION OF TROPICAL EXPORT CROPS (COCOA, COFFEE, RUBBER, PALM

OIL, ETC.) AND DOMESTIC FOOD CROPS (CASSAVA, MANIOC, MAIZE, RICE, WHEAT, MILLET SORGHUM, ETC). IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT IN SOME AREAS OF THE COUNTRY CASH FOOD CROPS AND EXPORT CROPS COMPETE FOR LABOR. SINCE CURRENT GURC POLICY GIVES PRIORITY TO THE LATTER, IT IS LIKELY THAT THE GROWTH RATE OF FOOD CROP PRODUCTION, WHICH ACCORDING TO THE WORLD BANK HAS EXPANDED AT AN ANNUAL RATE OF 6 PERCENT SINCE 1970, WILL LESSEN.

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5. IN GENERAL TERMS THE EMPHASIS PLACED BY THE GURC ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION COINCIDES WITH US PRIORITIES. AS A RESULT, THERE ARE A WIDE RANGE OF MISSION PROJECTS IN THIS AREA. FOR EXAMPLE, AID HAS A NUMBER OF CURRENT AND PLANNED PROJECTS, RANGING FROM A SEED MULTIPLICATION PROJECT TO WATER RESOURCES IN THE MANDARA MOUNTAINS, ONE OF CAMEROON'S POOREST AREAS, TO FINANCING TRAINING CENTERS FOR YOUNG FARMING FAMILIES. PEACE CORPS IS ACTIVE IN ASSISTING CAMEROONIANS TO RAISE FISH AS A SOURCE OF PROTEIN AND IN FORMING AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES. ON THE ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL SIDE, THE EMBASSY, IN COOPERATION WITH OPIC, HAS ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED US INVESTMENT IN CAMEROONIAN AGRICULTURE AND HAS EXTENSIVELY ASSISTED PROSPECTIVE US INVESTORS.

6. CONCLUSION: AS INDICATED PARAGRAPH ONE ABOVE, DIALOGUE BETWEEN GURC AND US MISSION ON SUBJECTS OF POPULATION AND FOOD PRODUCTION TAKES PLACE ON MANY LEVELS AND WITHIN CONTEXT OF ONGOING AND PLANNED PROGRAMS; AMBASSADOR, CT MEMBERS, AND ALL OTHER MISSION MEMBERS WHO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH GURC OFFICIALS ACTIVELY

PARTICIPATE. IT IS CLEAR THAT GURC POSITION ON POPULATION CONTROL IS STILL NOT WHAT WE WOULD LIKE IT TO BE. NEVERTHELESS, THERE HAVE BEEN POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH REGARD TO THE USE OF CONTRACEPTIVES. AS OUR PROGRAMS CONTINUE, HOPEFULLY THERE WILL BE A FURTHER EVOLUTION IN GURC POLICY IN THIS AREA. WITH REGARD TO FOOD PRODUCTION, GURC AND USG INTERESTS ARE GENERALLY IN AGREEMENT. CAMEROON HAS THE AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL, AND THE GURC INTENDS IT TO BE A SIGNIFICANT REGIONAL EXPORTER OF BASIC FOOD PRODUCTS (GRAIN, SUGAR). OUR CURRENT PROGRAM IS ASSISTING THE GURC IN REALIZING THIS GOAL. MISSION OBJECTIVE IS TO USE BOTH USG AND GURC RESOURCES AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE TO REALIZE MUTUALLY COMPATIBLE GOALS IN THIS IMPORTANT AREA.

7. RECOMMENDATION: EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS WOULD BE MORE WILLING TO ACCEPT CONTRACEPTIVE DISTRIBUTION PROGRAMS IF THEY ARE PLACED IN CONTEXT OF QUOTE FAMILY SPACING UNQUOTE RATHER THAN POPULATION CONTROL. MITHOEFER

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